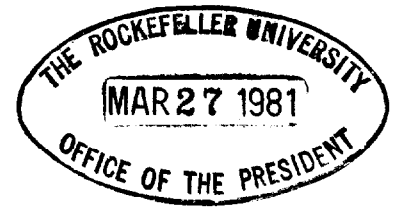# University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

College of Liberal Arts and Sciences
DEPARTMENT OF GENETICS AND DEVELOPMENT
505 S. Goodwin Ave.

515 Morrill Hall
Urbana, Illinois 61801

March 24, 1981

Dr. Joshua Lederberg
The Rockefeller University
1230 York Avenue
New York, NY   10021

Dear Joshua:

I was taken by surprise, not by Tracy's death but by the "death duties"
that are called for when one of his stature passes from the scene. The week
after he died I received requests for three biographical memoirs. I called
Indiana, hoping to share burdens with John Preer and Ruth Dippell, to dis-
cover that they had already acquired additional requests. We agreed that no
one can properly prepare more than one such statement, and we considered to-
gether who might provide useful complementary insights. At this point, I'm
not certain how some of the other bases are covered, but I have agreed to
write an interpretation of his career for Annual Review of Genetics. I also
agreed to help Genetics to get an appropriate statement. I know that you
have plenty to occupy your time, and that you have probably not followed
Tracy's career closely in recent years. I also know, however, that you and
he had a strong bond of mutual understanding and appreciation. I suggested
to Suzuki that a brief statement from you might be a more useful contribu-
tion to the record than a more lengthy discussion of specific contributions
by someone at close range. Perhaps I was influenced in that suggestion by
my appreciation of your essay on Tatum. I read your letter as indicating
at least a willingness to explore possibilities.

Your suggestion of a "joint submission" might be a way to do something
a little different, and perhaps illuminating. I have just about finished
the piece I promised to Annual Reviews (due April 21), and can't really do
something else. On the other hand, I have an "appreciation" (enclosed) I
wrote when Tracy retired five years ago, intended as the introduction to a
festschrift eventually published in Genetical Research. The editor refused
to publish the introduction, however, on the grounds that such things should
not be written about the living. It was distributed privately to the parti-
cipants in the symposium at Madison. Tracy was greatly bemused by the docu-
ment, taking it as a kind of mirror to his career. He discussed it widely
with his friends and believed that it said true things about him. We jokingly
referred to it as his "obituary", and noted that few have the privilege
of examining their own. It was, of course, written in a different spirit
than an obituary, with the expectation that he would read it and react. My
first thought, when Suzuki called, was to bring the "appreciation" up to
date. But when I reread it, I rebelled from the thought. The appreciation
was a kind of completed act, fixed in time. I didn't want to put new wine in
an old wineskin. At that point, I began to search for alternative commentators.

Suzuki indicates that he thinks the "appreciation" might be usable in some way, but not without modification. Possibly a "modification" that would satisfy both My reluctance and Suzuki's reservations, would be to present the "appreciation" as something of a historical document, with a short complementary statement by you, from a more recent vantage point and from a greater professional and personal distance. What would be required from you, perhaps, would not be so much a critique of Sonneborn's experimental work, as an assessment of the significance of his career (or whatever you think is suitable). I believe you are uniquely capable of providing perspective, and that the task would not require extensive research or lengthy discourse.

I'm sending a copy of this letter to Suzuki to elicit a double response. I hope that something along the lines suggested can be worked out. (I'll send a copy of my Annual Reviews essay when it is typed again; it probably contains useful biographical information if you decide you can do something.)

Yours very truly,

Dave

D. L. Nanney
Professor

DLN:leh
Enclosure
xc: D. T. Suzuki